

AN ACT concerning education.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity Act.

Section 5. Findings. The General Assembly makes all of the following findings:

(1) This State faces a shortage of qualified early childhood educators, with high vacancy rates in child care centers, community-based early childhood programs, and school-based classrooms across this State. Like roads and bridges, early education and child care is an essential part of our infrastructure that enables families to work in all other industries. Beyond addressing the current need, growing federal and State commitments to expanding early childhood services, including the recommendations put forth in the Governor's Illinois Commission on Equitable Early Childhood Education and Care Funding report in March 2021, suggest that this State must be prepared to meet the growing demand for a qualified workforce to deliver these services in the coming years.

(2) To meet this growing demand and support this critical infrastructure, the Illinois higher education

system must support our incumbent early childhood workforce through credential and degree attainment. The workforce is overwhelmingly made up of women and women of color, and many are balancing full-time employment, family needs, and other responsibilities. Often, traditional bachelor's degree programs are not accessible to place-bound, full-time working parents.

(3) In this State, there is a history of partnership among early childhood providers, stakeholders, and higher education to identify workforce needs and strategies to help promote access to higher education and degree completion among the workforce. Illinois institutions of higher education have taken steps to demonstrate a commitment to the early childhood field, as well as underserved student populations. Hybrid program models, cohort program models, and scholarships and financial incentives for students help to promote access to many early childhood degree programs in this State.

(4) Over the past 2 decades, this State has attempted numerous strategies to develop and support partnerships among institutions of higher education that are focused on this State's early childhood workforce. Through these broader initiatives, as well as many individual local partnerships, community colleges and public and private universities have worked to implement articulation agreements, credit transfer agreements, and program

delivery models, although not all partnerships have been maintained. Such initiatives include all of the following:

(A) In 2004, this State developed the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree model to promote articulation among 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education. However, with the challenges in credit transfer contributing to the limited viability and success of the degree model, the Illinois Community College Board stopped approving the AAT degree model and has worked across the higher education system to discontinue these programs.

(B) In 2013, this State dedicated federal Race to the Top funds to create the Early Childhood Educator Preparation Program Innovation (EPPI) Grant program. Among other goals, the EPPI Grant program aimed to foster the creation or further development of partnerships between 2-year and 4-year preparation programs at institutions of higher education, promote articulation and alignment of the curriculum between 2-year and 4-year programs, and support early childhood educator preparation programs in designing a curriculum to incorporate new State standards and program requirements. While the EPPI Grant program led to some effective partnerships that still remain intact today, program evaluations found varying levels of partnership and that, in many cases, successful

agreements were contingent upon individual relationships or individual leaders within institutions.

(C) Through the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI), there are 3 early childhood courses approved for articulation among participating institutions. More than 100 Illinois colleges and universities participate in the IAI, though challenges with inconsistent participation and recognition do exist.

(D) Most recently, the creation of competency-based education components for early childhood education will help ensure that higher education and credential programs are designed to prepare early childhood educators to demonstrate the same critical core competencies. The emphasis on core competencies could improve educator preparedness and could ease credit transfer and articulation processes moving forward.

These programs and partnerships continue to benefit many early childhood education students across this State, but, overall, these efforts have not produced adequate early childhood degrees to meet the demands in the field. These types of initiatives are highly contingent upon relationships and partnerships between specific institutions and are often impacted if an institution experiences turnover or program changes. Furthermore,

these partnerships often do not address the geographic, structural, and economic barriers the incumbent workforce often faces in accessing bachelor's degree programs while working full-time in the field. These ongoing challenges are not new and have been noted in the development of these previous efforts.

(5) As noted in the provisions of Public Act 101-654, the General Assembly recognizes the critical role of the early childhood workforce and, in response to challenges, including staffing shortages and barriers to higher education, calls upon the Board of Higher Education to better meet the needs of the early childhood workforce.

(6) The General Assembly encourages this State to consider dedicating federal funds for pandemic relief and economic recovery efforts to ensure a successful launch of the Consortium and the opportunities it creates to meet the needs of the early childhood incumbent workforce, including student financial support. This State, the incumbent workforce, and the children in care will benefit as workers enroll, persist, and complete credential and degree programs.

Section 10. Definitions. In this Act:

"Community college" means a public community college that is included in the definition of "Community Colleges" under Section 1-2 of the Public Community College Act.

"Consortium" means the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity.

"Credit for prior learning" means the evaluation and assessment of a student's life learning through employment, training, and experiences outside an academic environment from which skills that comprise terminal objectives are mastered to an acceptable degree of proficiency for college credit, certification, or advanced standing toward further education or training.

"Home institution" means the community college or university at which the student has been admitted.

"Incumbent workforce" means an individual or a group of individuals working or having worked in the early childhood industry, including family child care and center-based care settings, Preschool for All school-based settings, and Head Start, that serves children from birth to age 5 and includes teachers, assistant teachers, directors, family child care providers, and assistants.

"Member institutions" means the institutions of higher education participating in the Consortium.

"Public university" means the University of Illinois, Southern Illinois University, Chicago State University, Eastern Illinois University, Governors State University, Illinois State University, Northeastern Illinois University, Northern Illinois University, Western Illinois University, or any other public university or college, other than a community

college, now or hereafter established or authorized by the General Assembly.

Section 15. Creation of Consortium; purpose; administrative support.

(a) The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board shall create and establish the Early Childhood Access Consortium for Equity.

(b) The purpose of the Consortium is to serve the needs of the incumbent early childhood workforce and the employers of early childhood educators and to advance racial equity while meeting the needs of employers by streamlining, coordinating, and improving the accessibility of degree completion pathways for upskilling and the sustained expansion of educational pipelines at Illinois institutions of higher education.

(c) The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board shall convene the member institutions by July 1, 2021 or within 60 days after the effective date of this amendatory Act of the 102nd General Assembly. The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board shall provide administrative support for the start up and operation of the Consortium until a permanent governance structure is developed and implemented. The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board shall work with member institutions to establish geographic regional hubs, including public universities and the proximate

community colleges responsible for serving each regional hub.

Section 20. Membership; functions.

(a) Membership in the Consortium shall include all public universities and community colleges in this State that offer early childhood programs. Membership by private, not-for-profit universities is optional and conditional on the acceptance of the terms adopted by the public members, the related administrative rules, and the provisions of this Act. For-profit institutions of higher education are not eligible for membership in the Consortium. Participating institutions must be accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and entitled to offer Gateways Credentials.

(b) The members of the Consortium shall operate jointly and in cooperation through regional hubs to provide streamlined paths for students to attain associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, certificates, and Gateways Credentials and other licensure endorsements in early childhood education. The priority shall be to focus on the incumbent workforce, which includes working adults who require programs of study that offer flexibility in the times courses are offered, location, and format. The Consortium shall cooperate in all of the following:

- (1) Providing course offerings within each regional hub in online, hybrid, and in-person formats that are available to any student enrolled in a member institution

in that hub for occasions in which a particular course is not available at the student's home institution. In this paragraph (1), "not available" may mean the course is not offered during a term, at a time, or in a format that works best for the student. Courses taken at any member institution shall be accepted toward the student's degree at any other member institution. Course offerings across regional hubs may also be provided by an agreement between Consortium members. All course registration shall take place in consultation with a student's academic advisor.

(2) Shared responsibilities through the Consortium and within and across regional hubs to expand access for students.

(3) Transfers in accordance with Section 130-10 of the Transitions in Education Act.

(4) The development of standardized methods for awarding credit for prior learning.

(5) The support necessary for student access, persistence, and completion shall be provided by the home institution, unless otherwise provided by agreement between Consortium members.

(6) Admissions, financial arrangements, registration, and advising services shall be functions of the home institution but shall be honored across the Consortium.

(7) Member institutions working with their regional pre-kindergarten through 12th grade and early childhood

employer partners to determine demand throughout the region.

(8) Data-sharing agreements.

(9) An agreement that students enrolled in associate degree programs are encouraged to complete the associate degree program prior to transferring to a bachelor's degree program.

(10) Development of other shared agreements and terms necessary to implement the Consortium and its responsibilities.

By January 31, 2022, the Consortium shall decide how to assign college credit for the incumbent workers who have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential and for future workers obtaining a CDA.

(c) The Consortium may facilitate or implement the following if deemed beneficial and feasible:

(1) the creation of an open education resource library;

(2) support and training for program coaches and cross-institutional navigators; and

(3) support for the development, implementation, and participation in a statewide registry system through the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) to provide tracking and data capabilities for students across the system as they attain competency through coursework.

Section 25. Advisory committee; membership.

(a) The Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the State Board of Education, the Department of Human Services, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development shall jointly convene a Consortium advisory committee to provide guidance on the operation of the Consortium.

(b) Membership on the advisory committee shall be comprised of employers and experts appointed by the Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, and the State Board of Education. Membership shall also include all of the following members:

(1) An employer from a community-based child care provider, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(2) An employer from a for-profit child care provider, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(3) An employer from a nonprofit child care provider, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(4) A provider of family child care, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(5) An employer located in southern Illinois,

appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(6) An employer located in central Illinois, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(7) At least one member who represents an urban school district, appointed by the State Board of Education.

(8) At least one member who represents a suburban school district, appointed by the State Board of Education.

(9) At least one member who represents a rural school district, appointed by the State Board of Education.

(10) At least one member who represents a school district in a city with a population of 500,000 or more, appointed by the State Board of Education.

(11) Two early childhood advocates with statewide expertise in early childhood workforce issues, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(12) The Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson and the Minority Spokesperson or a designee of the Senate Committee on Higher Education.

(13) The Chairperson or Vice-Chairperson and the Minority Spokesperson or a designee of the House Committee on Higher Education.

(14) One member representing the Illinois Community College Board, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

(15) One member representing the Board of Higher Education, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(16) One member representing the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(17) One member representing the State Board of Education, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by the State Board of Education.

(18) One member representing the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(19) One member representing the Department of Human Services, who shall serve as co-chairperson, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(20) One member representing INCCRRA, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(21) One member representing the Department of Children and Family Services, appointed by the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development.

(22) One member representing an organization that advocates on behalf of community college trustees, appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

(23) One member of a union representing child care and early childhood providers, appointed by the Governor's

Office of Early Childhood Development.

(24) Two members of unions representing higher education faculty, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(25) A representative from the College of Education of an urban public university, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(26) A representative from the College of Education of a suburban public university, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(27) A representative from the College of Education of a rural public university, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(28) A representative from the College of Education of a private university, appointed by the Board of Higher Education.

(29) A representative of an urban community college, appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

(30) A representative of a suburban community college, appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

(31) A representative of rural community college, appointed by the Illinois Community College Board.

(c) The advisory committee shall meet quarterly. The committee meetings shall be open to the public in accordance with the provisions of the Open Meetings Act.

Section 30. Reporting. The Consortium shall report to the General Assembly, to the Senate and House Committees with oversight over higher education, to the Governor, and to the advisory committee on the progress made by the Consortium. A report must include, but is not limited to, all of the following information:

(1) Student enrollment numbers for the fall and spring terms or semesters, retention rates, persistence in relevant associate, baccalaureate, and credential programs, including demographic data that is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and federal Pell Grant status, reported twice per year. Completion numbers and rates, employer type, and years worked shall be reported annually.

(2) Tuition rates charged and net prices paid, reported both as including and excluding student loans, by enrolled members of the incumbent workforce, reported annually.

(3) Outreach plans to recruit and enroll incumbent workforce members, reported twice per year.

(4) Participation of the incumbent workforce in outreach programs, which may include participation in an informational session, social media engagement, or other activities, reported twice per year.

(5) Student academic and holistic support plans to help the enrolled incumbent workforce persist in their

education, reported annually.

(6) Evidence of engagement and responsiveness to the needs of employer partners, reported annually.

(7) The Consortium budget including the use of federal funds, reported annually.

(8) Member contributions, including financial, physical, or in-kind contributions, provided to the Consortium, reported annually.

Section 35. Goals and metrics.

(a) By July 1, 2021 or within 60 days after the effective date of this amendatory Act of the 102nd General Assembly, the Board of Higher Education's Strategic Plan Educator Workforce subgroup on the early childhood workforce must set goals for the Consortium for the enrollment, persistence, and completion of members of the incumbent workforce in associate, bachelor's, and master's degree programs, Gateways Credentials in Level 2, 3, or 4, and Professional Educator Licensure by September 30, 2024. The goals set for the Consortium must be data informed and include targets for annual enrollment and persistence.

(b) Data from the Gateways Registry, March 2020, indicates that there are 7,670 individuals with an associate degree who would benefit from progressing to a baccalaureate degree and 20,467 individuals with a high school diploma or some college who would benefit from progressing to an associate degree. If

the goals cannot be set in accordance with subsection (a), the goal for the Consortium shall be that by September 30, 2024, 20% of the individuals described in this subsection (b) who do not have a degree will have enrolled and be persisting toward or have attained a Gateways Credential in Level 2, 3, or 4 or an associate degree and, of the individuals who have an associate degree, will be enrolled and persisting toward or have attained a baccalaureate degree or will be persisting toward or have attained a Professional Educator License.

(c) Student financial aid, including incentives and stipends, data-sharing, and professional statewide engagement and marketing campaign and recruitment efforts are critical to the Consortium's ability to quickly attract and enroll students into these programs. Navigators, mentors, and advisors are critical for persistence and completion. If federal funds are not appropriated for these purposes and the other purposes of this Section, the Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the State Board of Education, the Department of Human Services, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development, in consultation with the advisory committee, shall adjust the initial target metrics appropriately by adopting challenging goals that may be attainable with less public investment.

(d) The Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, the State Board of Education, the Department of Human Services, and the Governor's Office of Early Childhood

Development, in consultation with the advisory committee, shall determine new metrics and goals for the Consortium as they relate to the remaining and future early childhood workforce, to be instituted after the close of the 2024-2025 academic year and going forward. Metrics must take into consideration that the pipeline depends on sustained, increased student enrollment and completion rates at the associate degree level if this State aims to continue with sustained, increased student enrollment and completion at the bachelor's degree level.

Section 40. Affordability. The institutions participating in the Consortium and the advisory committee shall work to ensure that students have the most affordable options for advancing through and attaining their degree or credentials.

Section 90. Rules. The Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Community College Board may adopt any rules necessary to administer and implement this Act.

Section 500. The Transitions in Education Act is amended by adding Section 130-10 as follows:

(110 ILCS 180/130-10 new)

Sec. 130-10. Gateway Credentials; associate degree.

(a) A community college student who earns the Department

of Human Services's Gateways ECE Credential Level 4 as part of an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in early childhood education that is consistent with the degree requirements established by the Illinois Community College Board and the Board of Higher Education, as appropriate, is deemed eligible for transfer into an early childhood education baccalaureate program at a public university if the student meets all of the requirements of the AAS degree program, is transferring from a program entitled to offer the Gateways ECE Credential Level 4, and earns a minimum grade point average of a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale.

(b) Recognizing that the AAS degree and other associate degrees provide important pathways into the early childhood education profession and notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, a public university shall grant junior level status in an early childhood education program to any community college student who has graduated from an Illinois community college with an Associate of Applied Science degree in early childhood education. A public university may not require students transferring pursuant to this Section to repeat courses taken and completed successfully at the community college and applied toward the associate degree granted pursuant to subsection (a) of this Section. All courses completed successfully in the AAS degree program must count toward baccalaureate degree completion. Students entering with an AAS may not be required to take a total number

of credits greater than those students first starting in a baccalaureate degree program. This includes any courses in which credit for prior learning was used to determine course equivalency and credit was awarded by the evaluating institution. Additional coursework may be required if a student is seeking to add one or more endorsements to the student's Illinois Professional Educator License.

Section 999. Effective date. This Act takes effect upon becoming law.